

VZCZCXRO6019
OO RUEHBI RUEHLMC
DE RUEHLM #1266/01 2560356
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 130356Z SEP 07
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6806
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0408
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 7395
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 5518
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4025
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1362
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 4092
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3178
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 7993
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5634
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0401
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2319
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001266

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS, G, AND DRL/SEA
NSC FOR NSC/DEMOC

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: RESPONSE ON PRESIDENT'S HUMAN RIGHTS
ROUNDTABLE AT 2007 UNGA

REF: A) STATE 125456 B) COLOMBO 1225

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Ambassador, Embassy staff, and Washington-based officials have made a consistent, intensive effort over the past year to engage the Sri Lankan government on improving its human rights record, and to support and defend human rights advocates in the country. Sri Lanka has recently shown some improvement on human rights, with the number of disappearances in the country declining. However, the government's performance on human rights still leaves much room for improvement. For a number of policy reasons, Embassy recommends against extending an invitation to President Mahinda Rajapaksa to participate in the President's Human Rights Roundtable at the 2007 UNGA (see paragraph 10). End summary.

¶2. (U) Ambassador and other EmbOffs have actively sought opportunities to encourage Sri Lankan government officials at all levels to improve efforts to safeguard human rights in Sri Lanka. Post has consistently conveyed our message, both publicly and privately, that the GSL needs to do more to stem the tide of human rights abuses. For example, Ambassador held a roundtable discussion on December 21, 2006 with representatives of 15 Sri Lankan and international organizations on the theme "Defending the Defenders: The Struggle of Human Rights Advocates to Safeguard the Fundamental Freedoms of Vulnerable Populations in Sri Lanka." Ambassador has also given many interviews to the local media on the importance of progress on human rights, including with the Tamil daily Thinnakural and the Indo-Asian News Service.

¶3. (U) The Embassy and senior Washington-based officials, such as Assistant Secretary Boucher, have argued strenuously for media freedom in Sri Lanka. Specific interventions by Ambassador led to new deliveries of newsprint to Tamil-language newspapers in Jaffna after a de facto embargo on newsprint supplies led to an acute shortage, stifling independent voices there. Ambassador has demonstrated support for the staff of two particularly beleaguered Tamil

dailies by visiting their editorial offices and allowing photos of the meetings to be published.

¶4. (U) Our Public Affairs section has regularly distributed publications with human rights themes, including USINFO articles and Electronic Journals, also employing Selective Dissemination of Information techniques to get out our human rights message.

¶5. (SBU) USAID has provided start-up help, institutional capacity-building and infrastructure to several organizations active in human rights in Trincomalee, Jaffna, and Colombo. These include communications and office equipment, instruction, training materials, and other help. Recipients have included human rights NGOs in Jaffna, the Civil Monitoring Commission in Colombo, which tracks disappearance cases, and civil society organizations such as the Muslim Rights Organization and Muslim Peace Council. The Ambassador also visited the Civil Monitoring Commission and invited the press to photograph the meeting to demonstrate U.S. support for that organization's efforts.

¶6. (U) In response to a number of politically motivated attacks on non-governmental organizations and serious incidents, including killings of humanitarian workers, Ambassador and USAID worked intensively with a number of other bilateral donors and international organizations to draft a set of Guiding Principles for the work of NGOs based on Secretary Rice's Guiding Principles.

¶7. (U) Following a meeting in March 2007 between SCA PDAS Steven Mann, Ambassador, and President Rajapaksa, Embassy

COLOMBO 00001266 002 OF 002

forwarded a list of 355 alleged cases of disappearances to the Presidential Secretariat for the GSL to examine. President Rajapaksa promised to look into these cases. To date, we have received partial information on 14 of the 355 cases.

¶8. (U) One of our most important recent initiatives was to join with an ad-hoc consortium of other donors to found and support the International Independent Group of Eminent Persons to observe and assist the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Human Rights Abuses. This Commission is investigating sixteen of the most notorious cases of assassination and mass killings that have occurred in Sri Lanka since August 15, 2005.

¶9. (SBU) We have placed particular emphasis on violations by armed paramilitary groups suspected of maintaining links with the military. Ambassador has been a strong advocate for holding human right abusers accountable for their crimes. There has been some recent progress in reducing the number of abductions, especially in the capital, but that improvement has not extended to the conflict-affected areas in the North and East of Sri Lanka. Human rights abuses in Jaffna are of grave concern and continue unabated.

RECOMMENDATION

¶10. (SBU) Embassy recommends against including President Rajapaksa in President Bush's roundtable discussion on human rights on the margins of the UNGA this year. Despite some recent evidence that our efforts have contributed to limited progress, the government's record on human rights and fundamental freedoms still leaves much to be desired. In Embassy's view, extending an invitation to President Rajapaksa to sit at a roundtable with President Bush and other human rights advocates from around the world is not warranted at this time and would undermine the message that the roundtable is intended to send. An appearance by President Rajapaksa at this venue would carry other important risks with it.

-- The international press would strongly criticize us for

providing this forum to a government that has a weak human rights record.

-- It would undercut our tough message to the GSL that it needs to improve its performance on human rights.

-- The U.S. Congress had been critical of the GSL human rights record. Influential members, particularly on the Senate side, might consider Rajapaksa's inclusion in a roundtable on this level provocative.

-- Finally, it would run counter to our policy not to offer meetings to the GSL at the most senior levels until we see a significant improvement in human rights conditions in Sri Lanka. Embassy believes this test has not yet been met.

BLAKE